Significance of the Djanggawul

a woman, possessed two daughters who were later to become the Djanggawul Sisters. But while the Yirrkalla myth and song cycle do not refer directly to them as Sun daughters, many symbolic references are made to the sun and to its warmth; in fact, the whole concept of the myth, with the growth of human beings and trees, and so on, depends on the presence of the Sun, through the agency of the Two Sisters. In the Milingimbi version this aspect is treated in great detail, if somewhat symbolically; one is left in no doubt as to who the two Sisters really were, and their affinity with the Sun. For example, the feathered strings from the *lindaridj* parakeet which they carried were symbolic of the sun's rays; they travelled from east to west, as the sun itself travels, and from their vulvae the sun's rays spread, while to-day one name for the disc of the midday sun is *dugu*, *gunbai* or *dala*, meaning the Djanggawul Sisters' vulvae or vaginae. [831]

There is little doubt, then, that the Sisters, if not the Brother, are projections of the Sun. If they are not Sun Goddesses themselves, they are closely linked with the Sun. The question of whether or not it is legitimate to describe certain Aboriginal Ancestral Beings as gods and goddesses raises, of course, a number of problems. Nevertheless, these particular Ancestral Beings are themselves divine in that they possess creative abilities, and are sacred in the full sense of the word. From this point of view, the appellation 'god' or 'goddess' is in order; but by using it we do not in any way imply that these Aboriginal Ancestral Beings, or the sacred emblems they brought with them, are worshipped in the Christian sense. The concept of 'worshipping' is far removed from conventional Aboriginal religious thought: things or Beings are held in reverence, or even in awe, but never worshipped in the way that we understand the term. Our choice of a title for these Beings, however, endowed as they are with all the attributes which go to form the idea of Godhead, is primarily a matter of terminology. [782]

These Beings brought with them to the Arnhem Land coast a variety of sacred emblems, which are material symbols of their cult. First and foremost was the *ngainmara* mat, alternatively called *muralungul*, *dalwuldalwul* or *wagulwagul*; the latter term applies particularly to the mat's 'mouth' or opening. *Ngainmara* is a secular term, with *nania* as another alternative. This mat is the symbolic uterus of either Sister, but it may also mean the whale, or simply a mat. Its attributes were so sacred, representing as it did the Uteri of the Djanggawul, that it is no longer endowed with ritual value; it has passed generally into the society, and is used primarily by women. That is to say, its sacredness was of such intensity that it could not be kept for use in ceremonies alone, but became an [831]

10: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1958
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entered almost open sea where the wind sweeps down from the northeast and Cape Wessel with terrific force. The western side of Napier's Peninsula was quiet and calm, but the moment we rounded the point we entered a heavy, stormy sea. To go back would have risked being dashed to pieces against the rocky cliffs of the point; we had to go on—across many miles of open sea.

Mahkarolla was in my canoe. Each canoe was equipped with a small sail and a paddle used as a rudder. Along the sides the men used paddles to steady the canoe and keep it from tipping over. The dugout canoes with no outriggers that are constructed by the natives of North Australia are unwieldy and easily upset even in calm water.

As the storm increased Mahkarolla became anxious and asked his older brother, Charli Charli Sit-Down, to act as steersman. In spite of his broken back he was probably the best canoeman in North Australia. He was entirely dependent upon the water for long distance traveling and had become an excellent sailor. Mahkarolla distributed the other men about the boat and took charge of the sail. He placed me in the center in front of Charli Charli.

I thought the waves would submerge us or dash up against the rocks, but the little canoe rose slowly over them and plunged into the troughs beyond. Sometimes the waves were so high that we could not see the sail of the other canoe. Finally, I suggested to Charli Charli that we go back. He shook his head and pointed to the rocks, indicating with a gesture that we would be swamped and killed.

The wind and waves were increasing. One man bailed furiously with a bivalve shell, for although the waves did not strike us the heavy spray filled our canoe. The natives mumbled to themselves. They were calling on their totem ancestors and their totems to help them. I said nothing and looked straight ahead. Then I started to swear in native at the storm. Charli Charli tapped me on the shoulder and asked me to stop because I would offend the Great Serpent and he might swallow us.

In gripping the gunwales I had one hand underwater. Charli Charli again tapped my shoulder and shook his head. He pointed to my hand and said, "Bult-main-dji" (gray shark). I pulled my hand out of the water and turned it so that the fingers were inside the boat. The day before our canoe had been struck several times by large sharks which had come to prey on a crocodile we had harpooned.

We sailed on. We had lost sight of the other canoe and wondered whether it had sunk or gone back. The wind increased and the waves rose higher and higher. We took down the sail because it was no longer possible to control it. It seemed only a matter of minutes before one of the waves would strike us and sink us all.

152 cannibalism which they regarded as indispensable to a
186 hunter in order to maintain his prowess at a level that
266 could earn for him the coveted title of *tjambait*.

During much of the time—amounting to several years—
123 that I lived in Arnhem Land I hunted with groups of the status of horde, which often claimed one or more *marngitmirri*. I frequently saw these men practising their cult, and was able to make a detailed study of both *marngitmirri* and *kalka* while I lived a nomadic life with these people.

Kalka *and* Marngit

754 The cult of the *ragalk* or *kalka—kalk'* of the Burara—, to which I have referred, is believed to be used to bring about the death of a man who has been made a scapegoat—frequently by a rite of augury—for the death of a member of an enemy horde. Often the victim will be a man against whom the deceased or his group have harboured a grievance of long standing, perhaps because he has failed to honour
[688 some payment such as that obligatory to one who has been
689] present at a *ngarra*—or clan totem—ceremony, to make a ceremonial presentation of *ngata*, food (really vegetable food), or of *gerri*, goods, valuables, to the elders of this clan. Of this obligation they say 'to pay back that *marr*'—to
[776 propitiate the *malli* of the culture hero whose totem is in-
782] volved. This *ngata* and the *gerri* presented by men who have attended the *ngarra* by invitation, are dedicated to the *wangarr* and are said to be *yarkomirri*, *i.e.* sacramental. Failure to discharge the obligation to make expiatory payments of the kind that I have mentioned places a man in danger of death by magic, even after a long period of time.

761 In Arnhem Land the belief is held that the death of any
754 person in full possession of his social personality is due, not to what the white man terms 'natural causes' but to the act of an enemy, often a person who is believed to bear a grudge, real or imaginary, against the deceased. Even death from sickness or drowning, from attack by shark or crocodile, and especially from snake bite, is not regarded as the primary cause, but merely the agent used by an enemy, or by a *ragalk* whose aid he has enlisted, to bring this about. The only exception to the belief about natural death is extreme old age, when, in the words of one of my informants, the people say 'time belong him now'—his time is spent, he has lived his life. Certain types of swellings
[688 and deformities are believed to result from ritual visitation
776 or punishment by the *wangarr*, the totemic ancestors, for
784] the violation, even accidental or inadvertent, of a tabu,
753] particularly on the eating of foods which are prohibited at certain critical stages in a man or woman's relation to his family or horde, as at initiation, on the death of near kin, or during pregnancy. Boils of a type distinguished as *mârlung* are believed to be due to ritual punishment and so held as proof of the violation of a tabu, usually on the eating of food that is *duyu* (tabu) at critical stages in a man's life.

753 A man in east Arnhem Land named Nyarrang pointed
776 to a large tumour on his neck and told me that it was due
773 to the *malli birlma*—*i.e.* a blow from the 'shade' or spirit of an implement called *birlma*—used today as a mallet or hammer in food-preparation by women, and 'found'

remaining with him all night. None of the medicinemen that I met in east Arnhem Land claimed to have a single *marrngit* only, and the number varied from two to four or five or even more, as in the case of Wilindjango, who had six (Plate J*b*).

The *marrngitmirri*, as he gains experience in the cult, is able to see on the body of a victim of secret killing spear wounds which are not visible to ordinary people.

As the drawings in colour in Plates I and J indicate, there is a considerable variation in the concepts of the *marrngit* entertained by the *marrngitmirri*, but all agreed that these are *wakkinngu*—profane, in the sense of non-sacred, with the special implication that they are not associated with, or dedicated to, the *wangarr*, and so not subject to ritual or supernatural sanctions. The *marrngit* and their cult are regarded, therefore, by the natives of Arnhem Land as apart altogether from totemism. This essential distinction was pointed out to me by my informants themselves. They emphasized it frequently by referring to their *marrngit* as *warrakan*—animals—a term that they never used for their totems, except in reference to the actual animal form which the totems sometimes assumed in ancestral times—for, being *wangarr*, they had supernatural powers and were not subject to the restrictions and limitations of ordinary men. They were *wangarr*, hence supernatural.

The people always described their totems as *malli wangarr*—the spirits or shades of the ancestral culture heroes—and therefore, *yarkomirri*, literally with, or having, a name, dedicated ceremonially to the *wangarr*. On ceremonial occasions the obligatory presentations of *ngata* (food) are dedicated to the *wangarr* concerned by the *dalkarramirri*, who acts in the role of high priest. And because of their association with the *wangarr*, all totems or totemic objects are subject to supernatural sanctions and are still watched over by the *malli* of these *wangarr* who guard jealously the observance of the rituals associated with the heritage that they left behind.

The demarcation between what is sacred and what is profane, between *yarkomirri* and *wakkinngu*, emphasizes the recognition by these people of the essential distinction between *marrngit* and totem, between religion and magic.

Notes

[1] The data presented in the paper were obtained when I was under commission by the Commonwealth Government in Arnhem Land, prior to the war, and during the war while O.C. Northern Territory Coastal Patrol and the Special Reconnaissance Unit, Norforce.

[2] *Oceania*, Vol. I, 1936, pp. 336–41.

[3] See Donald F. Thomson, 'Two Painted Skulls from Arnhem Land, with Notes on the Totemic Significance of the Designs.' *Man*, 1939, 1.

[4] *Tortork* is heart in the strictly anatomical sense, but some of my informants declared that it was also the seat of the *malli*, or shade, a kind of non-material or spiritual manifestation, which has nothing to do with the shadow.

[p.102(B)]

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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Magic profoundly influences everyday beliefs and habits, and an ordinary nomad, as well as the witch-doctor, may set in operation magical powers.[1]

Prayer is offered to the spirits of the dead, and they are not only called on to receive departing human spirits, but in time of sickness, a man will call on the waterspout to carry his prayer to the spirits of his relatives.[2] A patient may also enter a totemic waterhole inhabited by a great mythical snake, which will effect the faith-cure.[3] Mythical serpents are called on for help, and receive prayers in time of acute danger and distress.

Makarola told me that he had been overtaken by darkness when returning with his family after a day's fishing. A strong wind arose and the canoe was blown out to sea, waves half-filled it, and whilst wives and children baled frantically in the darkness, he toiled to keep the dug-out into the wind. Makarola then remembered his totem and called on it for help. He said that in that instant he saw a 'bright light' which 'filled' his head. By the light he was assured that they would be brought safely to land, and when the wind abated, the family landed in an exhausted condition.

Though awe and fear weigh heavily in aboriginal religion, the nomad's religious outlook and practices are best summed up under the term 'Totemism'. Such totemism links man and nature and goes back to the ancestral creators of Junkgowa, who made the earth and its inhabitants, instituted present-day laws, habits and customs, and defined for all time the nomad's outlook and beliefs. Totemic beliefs and the record of their bestowal are preserved in the Ngara ceremonies, which are linked with the totem centres where the hero-Ancestors performed their mighty deeds. Behind the supernatural Ancestors, and beyond the present world, is the spirit-land of Buralkor, from whence they came.

[1] Chapter 13, 'Black Magic.'
[2] Chapter 10, 'Medicine-Men and Magic.'
[3] *Ibid.*